

## HOUSE BILL NO. 172

INTRODUCED BY D. BEDEY, N. BALLANCE, J. ELLSWORTH, J. FULLER

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT ALLOWING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COUNTY AND MULTICOUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICES; PROVIDING FOR A STATE GRANT PROGRAM FOR COUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICES; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AMENDING SECTION 10-2-115, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

**Section 1.** Section 10-2-115, MCA, is amended to read:

**"10-2-115. ~~County veterans' service officers~~ County and multicounty veterans' service offices.**

~~(1) A county may, with the advice of the board, provide for a county veterans' service officer office to assist veterans and their families in filing benefit claims. If a county provides for a veterans' service officer under this section, the officer must be trained, accredited, and supervised in accordance with the applicable provisions of 38 CFR 14.629. A county may fund the position as provided for in 15-10-425 or through other means provided by law.~~

~~(2) The governing body of two or more counties may enter into a memorandum of understanding to establish a multicounty veterans' service office that operates under the same guidelines as a single-county office.~~

~~(3) Veterans' service officers assigned to county veterans' service offices must be trained, accredited, and supervised in accordance with applicable provisions of 38 CFR 14.629.~~

~~(4) A county may fund its veterans' service office as provided for in 15-10-425 or through other means provided by law.~~

~~(5) The board shall:~~

~~—— (a) monitor the qualifications of county veterans' service officers; and~~

~~—— (b) ensure that the department of military affairs provides technical assistance to county veterans' service offices whenever assistance is requested."~~

**NEW SECTION. Section 2. Funding county veterans' service offices -- grant -- conditions and reporting.** (1) (A) The board shall administer a grant program and award grants to county and multicounty

1 veterans' service offices from funding appropriated by the legislature for the purposes of this section.

2 (B) THE AMOUNT PAID TO EACH COUNTY OR MULTICOUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICE IS CALCULATED BY  
3 MULTIPLYING THE TOTAL BUDGET FOR ALL STATE AND COUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICES ANNUAL APPROPRIATION FOR  
4 THE GRANT PROGRAM BY THE RATIO OF THE NUMBER OF VETERANS RESIDING IN A COUNTY OR COUNTIES SERVED BY  
5 A COUNTY OR MULTICOUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICE TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF VETERANS RESIDING IN THE STATE,  
6 AS MOST RECENTLY REPORTED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND ROUNDING THE PRODUCT TO THE  
7 NEAREST WHOLE DOLLAR AMOUNT. ALL COUNTIES PARTICIPATING IN THE GRANT PROGRAM AND ROUNDING TO THE  
8 NEAREST WHOLE DOLLAR AMOUNT. THE NUMBER OF VETERANS RESIDING IN A COUNTY IS DETERMINED USING THE MOST  
9 RECENT DATA REPORTED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

10 (C) ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS ASSESSED BY THE BOARD FOR MANAGING GRANTS PROVIDED FOR IN THIS SECTION  
11 MAY NOT EXCEED 5% OF THE TOTAL AMOUNT ALLOCATED FOR GRANTS UNDER THIS SECTION. THE BOARD SHALL ENSURE  
12 THAT ALL NONADMINISTRATIVE FUNDS ARE DISTRIBUTED TO ELIGIBLE COUNTY OR MULTICOUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE  
13 OFFICES.

14 (2) To receive a grant, a county or multicounty veterans' service office shall:

15 (a) have established county funding as provided for in 15-10-425 OR THROUGH OTHER MEANS PROVIDED  
16 BY LAW;

17 (b) have established a physical office at an accessible location where veterans and their family members  
18 may visit in person;

19 (c) provide for at least one veterans' service officer ~~working a minimum of 1,000 hours annually;~~

20 (d) ensure that each county veterans' service officer meets the qualifications and requirements of  
21 10-2-115; and

22 (e) ensure that all of the grant money received pursuant to this section is spent in support of veterans and  
23 their family members AND MAY NOT BE USED FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE.

24 (3) If the requirements of subsection (2) are met, a grant must be awarded:

25 (a) to a county veterans' service office established before [the effective date of this act];

26 (b) to a new county veterans' service office during the biennium immediately following the date it was  
27 established; and

28 (c) each subsequent fiscal year a county veterans' service office continues to meet the requirements in  
29 subsection (2).

30 (4) The amount of grant money a county veterans' service office receives is in proportion to the number

of veterans residing in the county or counties served by that office AS SPECIFIED IN SUBSECTION (1)(B).

(5) A county veterans' service office that receives a grant shall report data and information to the department at the end of the fiscal year in which a grant was dispersed. Reported data and information shall encompass the following:

(a) disability benefit claims data and information, including but not limited to:

(i) the number of claim forms submitted by the county veterans' service office to the U.S. department of veterans affairs; and

(ii) the number of notices of disagreement or appeals submitted through the county veterans' service office to the U.S. department of veterans affairs;

(b) the number of medical enrollments submitted by the county veterans' service office to the U.S. department of veterans affairs;

(c) the number of veterans' education enrollments submitted by the county veterans' office to the U.S. department of veterans affairs;

(d) the number of county and state burial benefits processed by the county veterans' service office; and

(e) a description of any other ancillary services provided to county veterans, such as transportation services, mental health services, homeless services, crisis intervention, and military records requests.

~~NEW SECTION. **Section 3. Appropriation.** (1) There is appropriated from the general fund to the department of military affairs \$130,000 for the biennium beginning July 1, 2019, for the purposes of [section 2] GRANTS AWARDED TO COUNTY AND MULTICOUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICES AS PROVIDED FOR IN [SECTION 2].~~

~~(2) For each THE biennium beginning July 1, 2021, the department shall include in its base budget an amount necessary to provide grants to all counties that have met the requirements established in [section 2(2)], taking into consideration the population of veterans residing in these counties and the degree to which the county veterans' service offices reduce the workload of state veterans' service offices AND EACH BIENNIUM THEREAFTER, THE DEPARTMENT, PURSUANT TO 17-7-111 AND 17-7-112, SHALL INCLUDE IN ITS AGENCY BUDGET AN AMOUNT NECESSARY TO AWARD GRANTS PROVIDED FOR IN [SECTION 2].~~

NEW SECTION. **SECTION 3. APPROPRIATION.** (1) THE FOLLOWING MONEY IS APPROPRIATED FROM THE GENERAL FUND TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS FOR GRANTS AWARDED TO COUNTY AND MULTICOUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICES AS PROVIDED FOR IN [SECTION 2]:

1	<u>FISCAL YEAR 2020</u>	<u>\$30,000</u>
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2	<u>FISCAL YEAR 2021</u>	<u>\$30,000</u>
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3 (2) THE LEGISLATURE INTENDS THAT THE APPROPRIATION IN FISCAL YEAR 2021 BE CONSIDERED AS PART OF THE

4 ONGOING BASE FOR THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE SESSION.

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6        NEW SECTION. **Section 4. Codification instruction.** [Section 2] is intended to be codified as an  
7        integral part of Title 10, chapter 2, part 1, and the provisions of Title 10, chapter 2, part 1, apply to [section 2].

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9 NEW SECTION. **Section 5. Effective date.** [This act] is effective July 1, 2019.

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11 NEW SECTION. SECTION 6. TERMINATION. [THIS ACT] TERMINATES JUNE 30, 2024 2023.

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